DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 367 SO 024 862

TITLE	Beyond Title IX: Gender Equity Issues in Schools.
INSTITUTION	Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., Chevy Chase, MD.; NETWORK, Inc., Andover, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Sep 93
NOTE	36p.; For a companion document, see SO 024 863.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publication Department, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., 5454 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1500, Chevy Chase, MD 20815 or Intake Department, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, 99 Hudson Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10013 (25 copies or less, $3 each; over 25 copies, $2 each).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Discrimination; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; *Equal Facilities; Equal Opportunities (Jobs); *Federal Legislation; Females; Higher Education; Law Related Education; *Sex; *Sex Discrimination; *Sex Fairness; Sexual Abuse
IDENTIFIERS	*Title IX Education Amendments 1972

ABSTRACT

This document is one of a two-part set of publications. Both deal with equal education and provide a concise overview of Title IX and gender equity issues in education and steps to take to ensure nondiscrimination and equal education opportunity for all. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 mandates that schools not deny any student participation in any educational program or activity on the basis of sex. The reality is that while many schools adhere to the legal requirements of Title IX, they do not necessarily grant girls a full measure of equal educational opportunities. At one level, schools have made much progress in eliminating sex discrimination from their policies, programs, and practices. However, vestiges of sex discrimination, sex bias, and sex stereotyping remain. For example, although a policy prohibiting females from enrolling in vocational education courses historically nontraditional to their sex would be rare, girls and young women are not enrolling in large numbers in carpentry, auto mechanics, heating and air conditioning installation, or other such courses. Designed to accompany an updated, annotated summary of the Title IX regulatory requirements, this companion publication focuses on the key gender equity issues facing schools. Some key quetions schools should ask in the realm of student retention are: (1) Does the school's dropout prevention program take into account the needs of both boys and girls as well as minority and non-minority students? (2) What alternative programs are available to girls who are at-risk of dropping out? and (3) What is the underlying set of expectations that the faculty has for girls versus boys? Possible next steps for schools include: to the extent possible, keep accurate data regarding who drops out, why they drop out, what happens to them, and make sure the data are maintained according to sex, race, and ethnicity. (AA/DK)

ED 387 367

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Beyond Title IX:
Gender Equity Issues in Schools

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September, 1993

SO 024 862

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The Mid-Atlantic Center (MAC) is part of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (MAEC). The mission of the Consortium is to assist organizations to address issues of cultural diversity, race and gender equity, cross-cultural communication, and the establishment of multicultural programs and work environments.

The Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Center staff provides technical assistance and training services to school districts in the mid-Atlantic region in three program areas: race, gender, and national origin desegregation. Assistance for broad issues of school policy, reform, and restructuring is available as well as training and technical assistance related to specific regional, state, or local educational equity needs. Services are provided without charge to public elementary and secondary schools in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Publications are disseminated at cost to cover printing and postage expenses only.

The NETWORK, Inc., a nonprofit educational research and assistance organization founded in 1969, serves clients throughout the United States and abroad. Its major work focuses on organizational change, school improvement, and innovative school practices. The NETWORK provides a wide range of services to schools, business and industry, parent groups, and community organizations. Services include training, technical assistance, research, dissemination and information services, evaluation, and product development.

Headquartered in Andover, Massachusetts, the NETWORK has satellite offices in Washington, D.C., Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, and Burlington, Vermont.

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Preface

Beyond Title IX: Gender Equity Issues in Schools, developed by the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. and The NETWORK, Inc., is one of two publications designed to provide an overview of Title IX and gender equity issues in education. The companion piece, *An Annotated Summary of The Regulation for Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972*, is an update of an earlier edition developed by the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. This edition was prepared by the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., and The NETWORK, Inc.

Beyond Title IX: Gender Equity Issues in Schools provides an overview of key gender equity issues which schools are encountering today. *An Annotated Summary of The Regulation for Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972* alerts educators to the requirements of Title IX, clarifies interpretation and application, and explains recent changes that have taken place. The developers hope that these two documents provide a concise overview of Title IX and gender equity issues in education and steps to take to ensure nondiscrimination and equal education opportunity for all.

For ordering information, please see the last two pages.

Introduction

Do male and female students receive equal educational opportunities at school?

The answer to this question is both yes and no.

Title IX of The Education Amendments of 1972 mandates that schools not deny any student participation in any educational program or activity on the basis of sex. The reality is that while many schools adhere to the legal requirements of Title IX, they do not necessarily grant girls a full measure of equal educational opportunities.

At one level, schools have made much progress in eliminating sex discrimination from their policies, programs, and practices. However, vestiges of sex discrimination, sex bias, and sex stereotyping remain. These vestiges continue to have a powerful and often negative influence on many students.

For example, although a policy prohibiting females from enrolling in vocational education courses historically nontraditional to their sex would be rare, girls and young women are not enrolling in large numbers in carpentry, auto mechanics, heating and air conditioning installation, or other such courses. The fact that females still have not achieved educational equity, even though schools may have met the letter of the law, is then, the primary focus of this document.

Designed to accompany an updated, annotated summary of the Title IX regulatory requirements, this companion publication focuses on the key gender equity issues facing schools. These issues were identified by a number of gender equity experts across the country as being the issues that schools encounter most often. They reflect the inequities that exist even though schools may claim full compliance with Title IX. They are the issues that still must be addressed if schools are to ensure equal educational opportunity for students without regard to their sex.

Major gender equity issues identified include:

- Girls at risk of dropping out of school
- Gender bias in student/teacher interactions
- The participation and achievement of girls in mathematics and science
- Students enrolling in and completing vocational education courses historically non-traditional to their sex
- Gender bias in standardized tests
- Gender differences in learning styles
- Teen pregnancy and parenting
- Sexual harassment of students by their peers

There are two additional concerns that while not related to Title IX, have increasingly come under the purview of schools: increasing the self-esteem of girls and awareness of date or acquaintance rape. These concerns are included in this document because they are gender equity issues that are of growing concern among educators.

Each of these ten equity issues is presented in the following format. First, the issue is discussed briefly, including supporting data. Next are key questions to determine the extent to which a particular equity issue is a problem for a school or school district. Finally, there are selected strategies that schools can implement to increase equity, along with a list of resources that can assist in achieving these objectives. The publication concludes with a summary statement regarding schools' ongoing responsibilities for ensuring gender equity.

Girls at Risk of Dropping Out of School

Although definitions abound, we define students at risk as those who are in danger of dropping out of school because they are alienated from school, have a low level of achievement, and/or have a range of personal problems.[1] External factors over which schools have little or no control (poverty, families with low educational levels, minority status, for example) also contribute to students dropping out. While all at-risk students share many of these factors, at-risk girls have a particular set of circumstances that need to be recognized.

While 44 percent of young women cite pregnancy or marriage as their major reason for dropping out, the remaining 56 percent leave for a myriad of other reasons.[2] Many of the reasons reflect a sense of alienation from

school: a lack of individual success and/or that school is not worthwhile, reasons that both girls and boys cite for leaving. Additional factors related to girls dropping out include having a large number of siblings, mother's educational level, and belief in traditional gender-role stereotypes.[3]

Another factor putting some girls at risk is the low rate for which they are identified for special education services. In the past, about two-thirds of students receiving special education services have been male.[4] However, new data are emerging that lead educators to rethink the gender patterns in special education. Instead of innate genetic and/or physiological conditions, the patterns may stem from girls being under-identified and boys being over-identified based on traditional role behaviors for both sexes.[5]

Although girls drop out of school at a rate only slightly lower than that of boys, they are less likely to return to school or to obtain a general equivalency diploma once they have dropped out. In a study done in urban areas, 42 percent of the males returned to school and graduated but only 25 percent of the females did so. Furthermore, African American and Hispanic males return at a rate about 10 percent higher than females of those racial/ethnic groups.[6] Moreover, even students who return to earn a GED do not earn as much money in the work place as those with a standard diploma.[7]

Key Questions

Even though schools cannot control all of the factors that contribute to students dropping out, they do have the responsibility to make sure that in the areas they do have control, they promote student retention. Here are some areas to check:

- Does the school's dropout prevention program take into account the needs of both boys and girls as well as minority and non-minority students?
- What is the dropout rate (by gender, race, and ethnic group) for the district? What is the retention rate for elementary students? What is the course failure rate for secondary school students (also by gender, race, and ethnic group)?
- What alternative programs are available to girls who are at risk of dropping out?

- Are girls who are mothers or are pregnant encouraged to continue their education either in the regular program or in a special school? What resources, such as child care, are available to them if they do stay?

- What is the underlying set of expectations that the faculty has for girls vs. boys? Is dropping out seen as less of a problem for girls because of the myth that they will get married and have someone take care of them?

- Are there gender patterns in your special education enrollments? If so, what are they by gender, race, and ethnic group?

- Are girls encouraged to enroll in courses that will provide them with marketable skills with which they can earn a decent wage?

Possible Next Steps

- To the extent possible, keep accurate data regarding who drops out, why they drop out, and what happens to them. Make sure the data are maintained according to sex, race, and ethnicity.

- Determine whether or not your school's dropout prevention program takes into account factors of gender, race, and ethnicity in terms of why and when students drop out. Also, what programs and support services need to be in place to encourage students to return, e.g., child care for students who are parents?

- Review your procedures for identifying students and determining their eligibility for special education services. Make sure that students who are quiet, shy, and withdrawn are not overlooked. On the other hand, make sure that students who may be disruptive are not assigned to special education more for their behavior than for their educational needs.

- Stress the need for education and marketable skills for girls as well as boys.

Selected Resources

- *Female Dropouts: A New Perspective* (1989), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), 1012 Cameron St., Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 684-4000.

- *Going Places: An Enrichment Program to Empower Students* (1991), Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Publishing Center, Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Suite 200, Newton, MA 02160, 1-800-225-3088.

Gender Bias in Student/Teacher Interactions

Although most teachers believe that they treat girls and boys the same, research indicates that they frequently do not. Studies show that teachers often exhibit differential behavior even though circumstances do not warrant it. The teacher's sex seems to have little bearing on the outcome; it is the sex of the student that seems to make a difference. For example:

- Male students receive more of the teacher's attention (acceptance, praise, criticism, and remediation) and are given more time to talk in class from pre-school through college.[8]

- Although differences among subject matter areas have not been well examined, recent research has found student-teacher interaction in science classes to be biased toward boys.[9]

- Sex is a factor in the assignment of students to ability groups in mathematics, and males are more likely to be assigned to the high ability group.[10]

- Males receive harsher punishment than girls even for the same or a similar offense.[11]

- Teachers ask boys more higher order questions than they ask girls.[12]

Some researchers suggest that differences in treatment contribute to girls' lower self-esteem, lower self-confidence, and reduced risk taking. Others believe that societal factors play a major role. More research on student-teacher interactions that examines the relationship between teacher behavior and student performance, along with studies that look at interactions of gender with race, ethnicity, and social class, needs to be conducted.

Key Questions

The only way to determine if these data are reflected in your classrooms is to conduct some observations to check for the following behaviors:

- Do teachers have more interaction time with boys than they do with girls?
- Is the wait time, the time a student has to think about an answer, the same for girls and boys?
- Are student seating patterns or groupings sex segregated?
- Do teachers relay praise and criticism without regard to sex (unless a teacher is taking affirmative steps to praise students who may need extra encouragement)?
- Are boys and girls given equal chances to answer both recall questions as well as questions requiring higher order thinking skills, e.g., expressing an opinion, comparing and contrasting, and predicting consequences?
- Are there any differences in student-teacher interaction patterns when the race and ethnicity of boys and girls are taken into account?

Possible Next Steps

- Conduct classroom observations to determine the degree of equity that exists in student-teacher interactions.
- If data indicate that interactions are not equitable, conduct training to alert teachers to bias in their interactions and to help them develop skills to ensure a greater degree of equity.
- Conduct a survey of staff, support persons, parents, and students to determine if there is a perception of differential academic and career expectations for students on the basis of gender.

Selected Resources

- *GESA (Gender Expectations and Student Achievement*, 1990), a staff development program designed to increase equity in interactions. Delores A. Grayson, GRAYMILL Consulting, 8450 Hickman, Suite 29, Des Moines, IA 50325, (515) 252-8650.

The Participation and Achievement of Girls in Mathematics and Science

Historically, student enrollment patterns in mathematics and science courses have reflected significant sex differences. For example, girls have been more likely to take the minimal number of mathematics and science courses required for college while boys have been more likely to take advanced courses beyond the basic requirements.[13] However, recent studies show that these patterns are changing, especially in mathematics, as girls and boys enroll in and complete mathematics courses at a more similar rate.[14] The declining gap in course enrollment is reflected in the most recent National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) data. Although differences in scores are decreasing overall, they do increase as the students get older. According to the 1989–90 NAEP data, the average proficiency for males in science was 10.2 points higher than for females at age 17. In mathematics, the average proficiency for males was 3.4 points higher than for females at the same age.[15]

Regardless of data reflecting only minimal differences in courses taken between males and females, there are still significant discrepancies in the scores of males and females in mathematics and science assessments at the secondary level for college bound populations. For example:

- In 1992 males outperformed females by 44 points on the mathematics portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and by 9 points on the verbal section,[16] a consistent pattern over the last 20 years.[17]

- On College Board Achievement tests, males consistently average higher scores in all mathematics and science related subject areas.[18]

- On the 1991 Advanced Placement Examinations, the mean scores of males exceeded those of females in mathematics/calculus AB and BC, biology, chemistry, physics, and computer science.[19]

Whether these differences in test scores reflect the number of courses taken, actual achievement in mathematics and science, bias in the tests themselves, or other factors is not clear. For whatever reason, by the end of high school, girls express more negative attitudes toward both mathematics and science than do boys.[20]

Researchers debate the many causes for girls' negative attitudes, i.e. societal pressures such as conflicts in sex-role and peer expectations, inequitable school practices, and lack of support for achieving females. Whatever the cause, many times girls' negative attitudes result in their experiencing psychological barriers, such as insufficient matriculation, low self-concept, and fear of success.[21]

Regardless of contributing factors, the fact is that decisions are made on the basis of scores on these tests that negatively impact female students. The impact goes beyond college acceptances and scholarships — repercussions include barriers to career choice and success in the work place.

Key Questions

- What is the number of girls and boys enrolled in advanced mathematics and science courses, especially chemistry, physics, calculus, and trigonometry? Are girls underrepresented in any of these courses? What are the course-dropping patterns? This type of data should be collected and tracked not only by males and females, but also disaggregated by race and ethnic groups.

- What are the achievement test scores of males and females on standardized tests in mathematics and science? Are there differences by race, gender, and ethnic group?

- Are girls automatically excluding themselves from participation in mathematics and science courses by not taking the gateway courses (e.g., pre-algebra or Algebra I)?

- Do counseling services stress the importance of mathematics and science as preparation for the broadest range of career choices for girls as well as boys?

Possible Next Steps

- Intervene at key decision making points: 7th and 8th grades for the gateway courses and 9th and 10th grade for the advanced courses. Enlist support of parents.

- Provide concrete examples of the usefulness of mathematical and scientific skills to expand future career choices.

- Focus on career exposure rather than career choice. Providing students with many opportunities to talk with and learn about people in careers requiring mathematics and science is more effective in helping girls select more courses in these areas than simply stressing the need for broad-based preparation.[22]

- Encourage girls to take risks and to engage in activities that are messy.[23]

Selected Resources

- *Add-Ventures for Girls* (1990), fun, hands-on activities to help teachers make mathematics interesting and relevant to elementary and junior high school girls, Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Publishing Center, Education Development Center, Inc., 55 Chapel Street, Suite 200, Newton, MA 02160, 1-800-225-3088.

- *Science EQUALS Success* (1990), a collection of hands-on, discovery-oriented science activities for girls and students of color in grades 4 through 9, Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Publishing Center, Education Development Center, Inc.

- EQUALS, Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, (510) 642-1823, is the developer of *Use EQUALS to Promote the Participation of Women in Mathematics* (1980), *Family Math* (1986), and other curricula to aid the participation and achievement of girls and students of color in mathematics and science.

- *Mathematics and Science: Critical Filters for the Future* (1988) and *Opening Up the Mathematics and Science Filters* (1992), The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, 5454 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1500, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, (301) 657-7741.

Students Enrolling In and Completing Vocational Education Courses Historically Nontraditional to Their Sex

At a policy level all courses are (or should be) open to all students, regardless of gender. However, attracting girls to vocational education courses historically nontraditional to their gender is considered to be important because of the higher wages earned in technical occupations dominated by males. Gains that have occurred in vocational education since the passage of Title IX appear to be minimal and modest. State-level sex equity coordinators (a position mandated by federal legislation since 1976) informally report that although there have been success stories for individuals (a female plumber, auto mechanic, or carpenter, for example), the program enrollment patterns reflect minimal change.

Since national data on vocational enrollments by sex, race, or ethnicity are not complied nationally (only state by state), we have to look at national employment figures to help assess the impact of what is (or is not) happening at the local school district level. In doing so, we recognize the limitations of the data collection documenting vocational education and training and labor market outcomes for women and men in nontraditional occupations. We also know that the proportion of students enrolled in nontraditional vocational education programs is likely to increase more rapidly than their representation in related occupations.

Data from the past decade show a slight decrease in sex segregation in the work place. In comparing the 20 leading occupations of women in 1984 and 1992, the only change in the top five is the order: secretaries, cashiers, managers and administrators, registered nurses, and bookkeepers. However, a closer look shows small increases of women moving into optometry, engineering, firefighting, farming, and accounting, for example. Change is occurring, but the pace is slow.[24]

The possible causes for the persistent sex segregation in vocational programs are multiple and not always easily identified or remedied. Possible factors include isolation from friends by being in a separate school (such as a vocational-technical school) or separate part of a building; lack of female role models as teachers; absence or small number of other female students; hostile learning environment, especially because of sexual harassment; apparent lack of employment opportunities for women in a particular field; and strong societal traditions of sex-appropriate careers. Lack of awareness of programs, peer pressure not to enroll in any form of vocational training, and lack of support for students who wish to enroll in

vocational education are also possible factors. In fact, the historical patterns have been so difficult to break that some policymakers now believe that pursuing pay equity in the workplace (increasing the pay in many traditionally female occupations to that of men in comparable occupations) is likely to have a greater pay off than attempting to increase the number of women in male-dominated fields.

On the other hand, the changes taking place in vocational education — introduction of apprenticeships based on the European model and the 2+2 tech-prep programs (2 years of training in high school followed by 2 years postsecondary study) — offer new educational opportunities for recruiting young women. Creating a potentially stronger link between education and training, and higher wage jobs, these programs can provide female and male students additional career paths to acquiring highly marketable skills and/or further education.

Key Questions

- What are the data on the numbers of female students enrolling in and completing vocational education courses nontraditional to their gender?

- Does the school district have an effective policy protecting students from sexual harassment and other forms of sex discrimination while they are in school as well as on their cooperative or work-study jobs?

- Do the recruitment procedures involve adult females as role models (either as teachers or workers), as well as students currently enrolled? Does the scheduling enable students to have hands-on experiences in the vocational-technical shops/laboratories?

- Have common physical barriers or impediments such as: lack of restroom or changing facilities for girls, isolation from friends and other female students, and accessibility to program as well as work-study opportunities been identified and eliminated ?

- Are support programs such as: non-traditional mentors, basic skill supplemental instruction in math and science, child care, and vocational assessment and counseling available for students enrolled in programs nontraditional to their gender?

- Do vocational programs in general serve students — males and females — well in terms of knowledge, skills, and employability?

Possible Next Steps

- Revamp your recruiting program to include females as students, teachers, and workers. Make sure that the vocational education recruiting program has as much status and is treated the same way as recruiting programs in other areas. If the vocational education program is housed in a separate facility, make sure that all students have the opportunity to tour the site.

- Redesign your vocational orientation programs at the middle grades to make sure that both girls and boys have hands-on exposure to areas traditional and nontraditional to their gender.

- Enact a policy prohibiting sexual harassment of students by other students. The policy should specifically prohibit a hostile and intimidating learning environment.

Selected Resources

- The Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Publishing Center has a number of resources targeted to increasing the enrollment and completion of girls and women in areas nontraditional to their gender. The address is 55 Chapel Street, Suite 200, Newton, MA 02160, 1-800-225-3088.

- Each state is required by law to have a full-time sex equity coordinator for vocational education programs under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, Public Law 98-524. Contact your state department of education for that person's name and telephone. Call to see how she or he can help you, including providing you information on possible funding options for programs on increasing equity in vocational education.

- *Horizons: 2000 "A Career Curriculum for Girls in Grades 5-12"* is a program developed and piloted by Cheryl G. Bartholomew, Graduate School of Education, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA. For information regarding implementing this program in your school district, contact Margie Joyce, Administrator, 2740 Chain Bridge Road, Vienna, VA 22181, (703) 255-2215. If you are interested in reviewing or ordering copies of the curriculum, please contact Jalmar Press at 1-800-662-9662.

Gender Bias in Standardized Tests

On average, girls get better grades than boys at all levels of schooling but score lower than boys on key standardized tests administered to 11th and 12th graders. For example, boys outscore girls (with discrepancies greatest for African American and Hispanic girls) on both the verbal and mathematics sections of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)[25] and on all subsections of the American College Testing Program except English (ACT).[26] As a result girls lose millions of dollars in scholarship funds.[27] In 1988–89, 63 percent of the National Merit Scholarship semi-finalists were boys while only 32 percent were girls (sex of 5 percent of the students not identified). Since girls continue to earn better grades, there is continued evidence that the test is biased in favor of boys.[28]

Since eligibility for Merit Scholarships is based solely on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarships Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), girls are being denied their fair share of these scholarship funds as well as access to some of the most prestigious colleges and universities.

There is much controversy over why males outperform girls on standardized tests, with some believing that the reason lies in the fact that males and females approach learning differently and therefore analyze and solve problems differently. These tests may be designed in a manner more conducive to the way males solve problems. Furthermore, the context of questions is important, with both girls and boys doing better on questions with content familiar to them; and if more items favor boys, they have an advantage. References to males in standardized test items consistently outnumber those to females. Finally, girls complete fewer items and are more likely than boys to check an "I don't know" option and fail to complete the test.[29]

Data from the revised SAT, an experimental prototype scheduled for its first administration in 1994, show a small increase in validity based on gender. According to an Educational Testing Service (ETS) report, "...test revisions produced a modest reduction in the gender-related prediction difference for the verbal area, but a negligible change for the mathematical area."[30]

Since there is a movement toward alternative testing, educators will need to be even more alert to bias in performance based testing where sex, appearance, language, mannerisms, and other factors may have a strong influence on an unaware evaluator.[31]

Key Questions

While educators, advocacy group members, and publishers' representatives attempt to determine the causes of the discrepancies in scores, here are a few things to watch out for:

- Do girls understand the purpose of the SAT, that it is not a test of intelligence? (It is designed solely to predict first year college performance, and it under-predicts for girls and over-predicts for boys.)

- Do coaching classes include a proportionate number of girls, including minority girls? Do these classes take into account learning style/test taking style differences (e.g., girls tend to be more hesitant in guessing)?

- Are girls encouraged to take higher level courses, especially those in mathematics and science, which will better prepare them to do well on standardized tests?

- Is the test being used in a way that the testmaker intended, not as a way to track or place students in special programs based solely on a single test score?

- Does the test show evidence of bias (e.g., reliance on context unfamiliar to students of one sex, sex-biased language, fewer references to persons of one gender, etc.)?

- Do any of the new forms of assessment (e.g., portfolio systems) show evidence of gender bias?

Possible Next Steps

- Enact a policy on gender fair testing. Implementation of the policy includes the establishment of a committee and a procedure for reviewing all tests used in the school that includes equity concerns.

- Conduct test taking skills sessions for students, especially for female and minority students.

- Provide a means of covering the cost of taking any test so that no student is denied the chance to take a test because of inability to pay a fee.

Selected Resources

- National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest), 342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 864-4810, produces the pamphlet "Standardized Tests and Our Children: A Guide to Testing Reform," which is also available in Spanish.

- Phyllis Rosser's *The SAT Gender Gap* (1989) is available from the Center for Women Policy Studies, 2000 P Street, N.W., Suite 508, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 872-1770.

- *Harvard Project Zero*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Longfellow Hall, Appean Way, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 495-4342. This project focuses on alternative forms of assessment for young children.

Gender Differences in Learning Styles

There has been much discussion about differences in learning styles (information processing routines that function in a trait-like manner at the personality level). Often taken out of context and distorted, facts regarding learning styles are misleading and can be detrimental to educational efforts. Data indicating a difference in learning styles related to psychological type, culture, race, sex, or ethnicity do not mean that a group of students can learn in only one way. They simply mean that students of the group have a preference — much like a preference for right- or left-handedness. Nor do the data show that all students of a particular gender or racial/ethnic group possess that preference.

All students need to experience success, and their chances of doing so are greatest when they have a significant number of opportunities to learn in their preferred mode(s). At the same time, all students need some level of skill in learning in their non-preferred modes. For example, consider a student who learns best by the use of manipulative materials but who has no instruction through a hands-on approach. Learning is more likely to be less enjoyable and/or somewhat less efficient and successful than if the student could use her/his preferred mode. This difference in learning styles is reflected in students' choice of courses and their like or dislike of the instructional strategies. Students who learn only in their preferred mode are ultimately at a disadvantage also because they are less likely to develop skills in their nonpreferences. Teachers who are aware of different learning styles can vary their instructional techniques so that students are more efficient and successful learners who enjoy what they do.

Research shows differences for males and females on three of the major approaches to learning styles: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator's and the Murphy-Meisgeier Type Indicator for Children's decision making scale, the Kolb Learning Style Inventory's dimension on taking in information, and Herman Witkin's field independence and field sensitivity (the latter also shows a difference related to race and ethnicity).[32]

In terms of classroom implications, schools are geared more to the learning styles of white males, which tend to be individualistic and competitive. In contrast, many girls prefer cooperation over competition, acknowledging and building on others' ideas to define common meanings over individual contributions, and understanding over assessment. Also, girls are more social and comfortable in group situations. As a result, girls are likely to be more productive in situations involving group instruction, including cooperative learning.[33] It is important to reiterate that the characteristics just described will apply to a majority of — but not all — girls as well as to a minority of boys.

Key Questions

- Have teachers been trained in one or more approaches to understanding and accommodating learning style differences that include information on gender and racial/ethnic differences?
- Do teachers use a variety of instructional techniques including cooperative learning, role plays, skits, and team projects along with more traditional methods?
- Do teachers avoid competitive situations that pit boys against girls or having students choose their peers for team membership so that some students (often the same ones) are always chosen last?
- Do teachers equally value all ways of learning and convey that value to students?
- Do teachers offer students options for completing work, e.g., writing a report or making an oral presentation?
- If students fail to achieve, are they provided with opportunities to learn the material differently rather than to repeat the same experience?

Possible Next Steps

- Conduct training for teachers in one or more of the approaches to identifying and accommodating different learning styles.

- Read the following: Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind* (1985), on multiple intelligences; Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982), on psychological theory and women's development; Isabel Meyer's *Gifts Differing* (1991), on psychological preferences; or *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986) by Mary Field Belenky, et al.

Selected Resources

- Contact The NETWORK, Inc., 300 Brickstone Square, Suite 900, Andover, MA 01810, (508) 470-1080; or the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., 5454 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1500, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, (301) 657-7741, for information on training in learning and teaching styles in a multicultural setting.

Teen Pregnancy and Parenting

Starting in 1987, the teenage birth rate began to climb, reversing a 16-year trend of declining or stable rates. In 1990, 68 percent of births to females under age 20 were to unmarried mothers. Moreover, teen birth rates vary by race and ethnicity with the highest rates for African Americans and Hispanics and the lowest for Asians/Pacific Islanders and whites.[34] These data point out that our nation, including our schools, have not yet resolved a major social concern.

Of the more than 1 million young women who will become pregnant this year, half will choose abortion; half will choose to have a baby,[35] with less than 3 percent of those placing the child for adoption.[36] Regardless of their decision, these students are at a high risk for either dropping out of school or having their school interrupted.

Teenage pregnancy and parenting has serious educational and economic consequences for girls; by reducing their chance of receiving a quality education, they significantly narrow their life options. The age at which a girl has her first child is closely related to her chances of living at or below the poverty level and receiving AFDC.[37] In addition, teen mothers are at a greater risk of having babies with low birth weight, babies who are addicted to drugs, or babies who have AIDS.

Although barriers to school attendance for young mothers have declined, many schools are still reluctant to face issues of teen pregnancy because of personal and societal values and beliefs. Research confirms that traditional sex education courses alone do not prevent pregnancies. However, most schools are fearful of providing a comprehensive curriculum on sex education, health and birth control information and services, assistance in receiving support services, and — once students become parents — access to day care, health services, and other services that are so necessary for students to remain in school. For example, out of the more than 20,000 secondary schools in the country, only 306 have school-based clinics; and of that number, 60 provide birth control services.[38] The issue continues to grow as girls are having babies faster than we can provide solutions or support.

Key Questions

- Are girls given explicit encouragement regarding self-esteem and academic achievement? If girls see themselves as competent and capable of achieving life goals, they are less likely to become pregnant.

- Is pregnancy prevention addressed in a serious and meaningful way for both boys and girls? Different approaches may apply to different communities.

- Once a young woman becomes pregnant, is she given proper encouragement and support to continue her education during and after pregnancy? Are there options such as home study?

- Does the school offer on-site medical care, or are services available nearby?

- Is on-site day care available for students who are parents?

- Are boys encouraged to assume responsibility for the care and support of their children, and is training provided to help them do so?

Possible Next Steps

- Set up a day care facility for students with children if one is not available in your district. If the number is insufficient to justify the cost, include the children of school employees to have a sufficient number of youngsters.

- Review all of your policies and procedures to make sure that they are equitable for pregnant and parenting students, including fathers.

- Make sure that your dropout prevention program addresses the needs of pregnant and parenting students.

Selected Resources

- *Just What the Doctor Should Have Ordered* (1989), Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Publishing Center, 55 Chapel Street, Suite 200, Newton, MA 02160, 1-800-225-3088.

- *Counselor/Advocates: Keeping Pregnant and Parenting Teens in School* (1989), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), 1012 Cameron Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 684-4000.

- *Juggling Lessons: A Curriculum for Women Who Go to School, Work, and Care for their Families* (1989); *A New Attitude: Life Skills for Returning Women* (1992); and *It Happened to Us* (1988), posters and booklets related to teen pregnancy, The NETWORK, Inc., 300 Brickstone Square, Suite 900, Andover, MA 01810, (508) 470-1080.

- A wide variety of resources are available from your local Planned Parenthood Office as well as the Children's Defense Fund, 122 C Street, N.W., Washington, DC, (202) 628-8787.

- Check with your local welfare office to determine what resources are available to your district (especially child care) under the Family Support Act.

Sexual Harassment of Students by Their Peers

One sex equity issue, which has come to the forefront recently, is sexual harassment of students by other students. Many districts are now reviewing their sexual harassment policies to make sure that they prohibit sexual harassment of students by their peers. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has issued a groundbreaking finding in affirming that elementary school boys' sexual taunting of girls did indeed constitute sexual harassment.[39]

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual attention. That includes leering, pinching, fondling, grabbing, suggestive verbal comments, spreading sexual gossip, subjecting someone to sexually oriented materi-

als, pressure for dates and/or sexual activity, unwelcomed physical contact of a sexual nature, sexual assault, and rape. Although the more severe forms of sexual harassment are likely to come to the attention of school officials, the less severe forms are not. In fact, the traditional interpretation of many of these behaviors is that they are just typical of the age group and have been largely ignored. What educators are now realizing is that these behaviors can be devastating to students and can cause them to drop out of a program or class or to avoid certain school situations, thereby having a negative impact on their educational experience and denying them equal educational opportunity.

Sexual harassment of peers is found in all grade levels. It often starts in the elementary school with teasing or other inappropriate remarks regarding another's body, as well as bullying and playground roughhousing. Although the impact of sexual harassment is greater for girls, boys also experience harassment. Same-sex harassment, especially with taunts related to homosexuality, are very common.

Key Questions

- Does the district have a policy prohibiting sexual harassment; and, if so, does it specify sexual harassment of students by their peers?
- Does the student handbook contain a statement prohibiting sexual harassment of students by other students? Are there sanctions for students who violate this regulation?
- Does the sex education/family life program of the district teach appropriate and inappropriate expressions of sexual behavior?
- Are students who complain of sexually harassing behavior taken seriously and their complaints handled in a professional manner?
- Are there safeguards for students who are enrolled in courses nontraditional to their gender where sexual harassment is more likely to occur (e.g., girls enrolled in auto mechanics or welding or boys enrolled in nursing or cosmetology)?

Possible Next Steps

- Enact a policy prohibiting all forms of sexual harassment of students by other students; make sure that all students are aware of the policy and sanctions for its violation. (Be alert to any possible conflicts of your policy with First Amendment rights to freedom of speech.)

- Incorporate information regarding sexual harassment in all of your district's family life education courses.

Selected Resources

- *Who's Hurt and Who's Liable: Sexual Harassment in Massachusetts Schools — A Curriculum and Guide for School Personnel* (1986), Bureau of Equity and Language Services, Massachusetts Department of Education, 1385 Hancock Street, Quincy, MA 02169, (617) 770-7545.

- *Sexual Harassment and Teens: A Program for Positive Change* (1992), Free Spirit Publishing, 400 First Avenue North, Suite 616, Minneapolis, MN 55401, 1-800 735-7923. Cost is $17.95.

- *Tune in to Your Rights: A Guide for Teenagers about Turning Off Sexual Harassment* (1985), Program for Educational Opportunity, School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, (313) 763-9910. Cost is $3.00. Also available in Spanish.

- The federally funded Desegregation Assistance Centers (DACs) can assist you with sexual harassment issues in your school district. For the DAC serving your state, call the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, DC, at (202) 401-1361.

Awareness of Date or Acquaintance Rape

Although we have come to associate acquaintance or date rape with college campuses, it does happen with elementary and secondary school students. We know that from the statistics on increasing rates of sexual activity among teens, an increase in the proportion of pregnant teens, and the prevalence of newspaper and anecdotal accounts of incidents.

Acquaintance rape is sometimes difficult for women and men to define as they may be confused about "normal" male behavior versus a woman's

willingness to engage in sexual activity. If it is difficult for adults to define, then it is even harder for young people, who are just beginning to understand the complexities of a sexual relationship.

Although the school cannot control what happens to students outside the bounds of the school day, educators can help students understand that acquaintance rape is a form of violence against women and girls, and can also ensure an educational environment in which girls feel safe. Educators can also then promote a school climate based on respect and dignity and model that behavior for students and help them behave accordingly.

Key Questions

- Do school policies address sexual assault? Are students and staff trained to recognize sexual assault and to resolve complaints?
- Do sex education and family life courses address the issue of acquaintance rape? Do these courses convey strongly that all forms of violence against women, including abusive language, threats and intimidation, destruction of another person's property, and physical assault are unacceptable and illegal?
- Are students made aware of the circumstances surrounding acquaintance rape, e.g., that use of alcohol or drugs is often a factor in such incidents?
- Are counseling services available to students who have been raped?

Possible Next Steps

- If your district does not have one, take steps to develop and enact a policy prohibiting sexual assault of students by other students.
- Incorporate information about acquaintance rape as well as other forms of violence against women in your district's family life education courses. Make sure that the information is conveyed to boys as well as girls.
- Make sure your district has a policy and procedure regarding notification of law officials, parents, and community when instances of rape and sexual assault occur on school grounds.

Selected Resources

- Check with the women's center in your area for materials on violence against women such as Helen Benedict's *Recovery: How to Survive Sexual Assaults for Women, Men, Teenagers and Their Friends and Family* (1985).

- Have a representative from your local law enforcement office talk with students about domestic violence.

- *Preventing Teen Dating Violence — Three Session Curriculum for Teaching Adolescents* by Carole Sousa, Lundy Bancroft, and Ted Gorman. Available from Transition House, P.O. Box 350, Harvard Square Station, Cambridge, MA 02238.

Increasing the Self-Esteem of Girls

Self-esteem — it's illusive, intangible, hard to quantify, but extremely important. A child's sense of self develops early and is highly resistant to change.[40] Moreover, pre-teen and teen girls with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to depression, drug and alcohol abuse, early pregnancy, and dropping out of school.[41] A recent study done by the American Association of University Women found declining self-esteem in girls. Although at ages 8 and 9, girls are confident and assertive, by the time they emerge from adolescence they have a poorer self-image, less confidence about themselves and their abilities, and more limited views about their future. Sixty-seven percent of the boys reported they felt "happy the way I am" with 60 percent of the girls feeling positive about their lives at the pre-teen level. Eight years later, 46 percent of the boys still felt positive, while only 29 percent of the girls were still feeling good about themselves.[42]

When and how does it happen? According to the study, family and school rather than peers have the greatest impact on the self-esteem and aspirations of young people. The study found that pride in schoolwork and students' feelings of being good at things declines rapidly through adolescence for both boys and girls. However, as boys found that others express confidence in males' ability to do things, they grew in self-esteem. As girls found that others, including their teachers, believe that females cannot do things they believe they can, their self-esteem declines. Thus, teachers can play a key role in building self-esteem in girls.

Key Questions

- Do school activities emphasize student individuality?
- Does the school promote true diversity, providing ways for girls to feel free to express themselves in ways that are important to them?
- Do focused self-esteem programs, e.g., for substance abuse, take into account the needs of females?
- Do teachers reward girls for academic and athletic performance rather than for their social skills or physical appearance?
- Do school activities directly confront the issues around being male and being female in our society?
- Are both sexes encouraged to work collaboratively?

Possible Next Steps

- Within your school, grade level, or department, undertake a program that directly addresses girls' self-esteem.
- Set up a mentoring program so that selected students have opportunities to spend time with either older students or adults who can help strengthen their self-esteem.
- Contact your Desegregation Assistance Center for training in bias in student-teacher interaction to make sure that teachers are providing praise and criticism to girls in ways that build rather than deflate their self-esteem.

Selected Resources

- *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* (1991), American Association of University Women, 1111 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 1-800-225-9998.
- *Choices* (1985), Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara, 531 East Ortega Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93103, (805) 963-4757.
- *Images: A Workbook for Enhancing Self-Esteem and Promoting Work Preparation* (1988), Mattie Evans Gray, Circle Project, California State University, 655 University Avenue, Suite 109, Sacramento, CA 95825, (916) 923-5990.

Conclusion

The issues selected for this publication are selective rather than comprehensive. Schools across the country still face a myriad of gender inequities. Some of those not addressed here include increasing the number of women in educational administration, gender issues in drug education programs, gender fair disciplinary policies and procedures, gender implications of enacting a policy requiring students to wear uniforms, and gender bias in sex education/family life programs.

Schools must regularly review their policies, procedures, and programs for evidence of gender bias and discrimination. A one-time audit or compliance review reflects the status of equity in a school or a district at that time. Changing curricula, new policies and procedures, and staff turnover may create new inequities which need to be addressed. Equity has moved from the periphery to the core of our educational system. Education is indeed for all.

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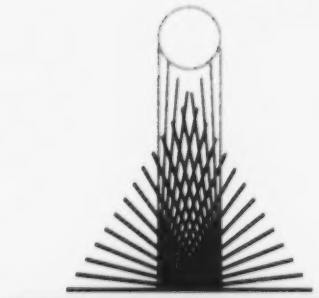

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